

How To Talk To Children About Parental Substance Use Addiction

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WEST FRANKFORT – A major concern for parents struggling with substance use addiction is how to talk to their children about their addiction. As difficult as this conversation may be, it is a very necessary conversation to have with your children.

Children are likely aware something is going on. Many children are afraid to speak up and ask questions because they do not understand what or why things are happening the way they are in their home. Having a conversation with them about addiction can not only help them better understand what is going on, but it can also help them understand it is ok to talk about it as well.

When deciding how to approach the conversation, it is very important to keep the conversation age-appropriate. It is important to plan the time of the conversation around the children. Make sure you have the conversation at a time of day where the children are more relaxed, not rushed or headed out to school or other events. Have the conversation in an environment they are comfortable in and feel safe.

When deciding what to say, remember small children could be overwhelmed or even scared by a lot of details. Older children and teenagers may already be harboring some resentments and could appear closed off during the conversation. They are listening though. Keep the conversation simple. Explain the disease concept. Help them understand treatment and recovery. You may even compare addiction to a medical problem they do understand to help them grasp the concept.

Be sure to allow time to answer questions after your simple explanation. They may not know what questions they want to ask yet so remind them you are available for any questions they have. You may even set up a time to talk again in a few days.

Another important thing to remember as you prepare for this conversation are the seven Cs. Take time to reassure them that they did not **C**ause the addiction, they cannot **C**ontrol the addiction and they cannot **C**ure the addiction. It is also important to encourage them to take **C**are of their self, **C**ommunicate their feelings, make good **C**hoices, and **C**elebrate their self.

Most importantly, whenever and however you decide to have the conversation with your children, be honest with them. Children are likely making their own assumptions about what is going on. Modeling honesty not only helps build the parent/child relationship, it helps them feel comfortable being honest with their thoughts and feelings as well.

If you or your child need help talking about addiction, Centerstone is available to help. Call 1-877-HOPE123 (877-467-3123).

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